

St Luke's Cockatoo Fire Policy

Final Version 10/4/2024 Approved by Parish Council.

Purpose:

Cockatoo is an area with a very high risk in case of fire. This policy is designed to provide clear guidelines what to do in case of extreme or catastrophic fire days, and also a plan for time when there is an actual bushfire threatening Cockatoo.

Scope:

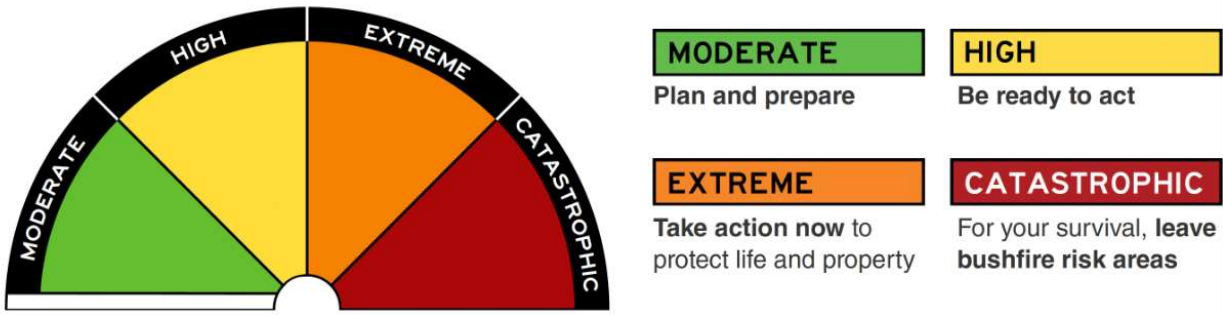
This policy covers the church building and Vicarage located at 1-3 McBride St, Cockatoo. Programmes operating at other venues will be subject to the policies of the venue. This policy is intended to provide clear direction for staff and parishioners in times of fire risk.

Fire Ratings:

There are new fire ratings across Victoria. The following diagram from the CFA website explains them.

<https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/fire-bans-ratings-and-restrictions/about-fire-danger-ratings>

The new Fire Danger Ratings



There are four levels of fire danger in the new system:

- **Moderate** - Plan and prepare
- **High** - Be ready to act
- **Extreme** - Take action now to protect your life and property
- **Catastrophic** - For your survival, leave bushfire risk areas

For each level specific actions are recommended. This policy will focus primarily on responses during times of extreme or catastrophic fire ratings.

Catastrophic:

- Your life may depend on the decisions you make, even before there is a fire.
- For your survival, do not be in bushfire risk areas.
- Stay safe by going to a safer location early in the morning or the night before.
- Homes cannot withstand fires in these conditions. You may not be able to leave and help may not be available.

Extreme:

- Check your bushfire plan and that your property is fire ready
- If a fire starts, take immediate action. If you and your property are not prepared to the highest level, go to a safer location well before the fire impacts.
- Reconsider travel through bushfire risk areas.
- Leaving bushfire risk areas early in the day is your safest option.

High

- There's a heightened risk. Be alert for fires in your area.
- Decide what you will do if a fire starts.
- If a fire starts, your life and property may be at risk. The safest option is to avoid bushfire risk areas.

Policy:

Decisions about actions to do with Fire Warning Days will be made 24 hours before the activity.

1. Catastrophic Fire Warning Days**a) Church Services and programmes cancelled**

Due to the risk to participants both in attending and travelling, programmes will be cancelled. The decision to cancel programmes will be made by the Vicar and Wardens on the day prior to a predicted Catastrophic Fire Risk day. This will be communicated by the church admin assistant via email, and also posted on the website.

A detachable sign will be placed on the church sign outside the premises.

If the church service is cancelled an online service will be organised if possible.

b) Vicarage evacuated

The Vicar and family must evacuate the Vicarage and find alternative accommodation on such days. If additional expense is incurred in finding alternative accommodation for the night, this should be reimbursed, but ideally the Vicar will find family or friends to stay with until it is safe to return. The evacuation should take place the night before any Catastrophic Fire Days.

c) Hire of premises

If the church or hall is being hired for use on a Catastrophic Fire Warning Day, the event must be cancelled (eg wedding, funerals). This policy should be shared with anyone planning to hire the hall. The decision to cancel will be communicated by the Vicar or wardens on the day before.

2. Extreme Fire Warning Days

a) Church services and programmes to be cancelled

Due to the risk to participants both in attending and travelling, programmes will be cancelled. The decision to cancel programmes will be made by the Vicar and Wardens on the day prior to a predicted Extreme Fire Risk day. This will be communicated by the church admin assistant via email, and also posted on the website.

A detachable sign will be placed on the church sign outside the premises.

If the church service is cancelled an online service will be organised if possible.

b) Vicarage

If there is no fire, the Vicar and family may remain in the Vicarage but be prepared to leave early if any fire is in the area.

c) Hire of premises

If the church or hall is being hired for use on a Extreme Fire Warning Day, the event must be cancelled (eg wedding, funerals). This policy should be shared with anyone planning to hire the hall. The decision to cancel will be communicated by the Vicar or wardens on the day before.

3. In Case of Fire threatening Cockatoo

The Parish should enact the Fire Plan which forms an appendix to this policy.

4. General Principles

- a)** The Parish should maintain an up-to-date Fire Plan. This should be reviewed by the Wardens and Vicar prior to each year's fire season (by November).
- b)** The Parish is in a very high danger area for fire and has the terrible past history of loss of life and property. Decisions regarding fire should always seek to maximise the safety of people.
- c)** A Working Bee should be called each year prior to fire season (in October) in order to review the property and reduce any fire risks.
- d)** When hiring out the Church Building or Hall, the risk of fire and the possibility of cancellation depending on Fire Warnings should be made known to the users. It may also become necessary to have specific periods where the hall is not available for hire for events which are outside of normal programmed activities such as weddings, funerals, parties

Appendix: Fire Plan 2024

1. Preparation

Each year the Parish will have a special working bee to reduce fire risk to the Church, Hall and Vicarage. This should occur in October.

An offsite backup should be kept of important church computer records. The Admin Assistant should back up records on a regular basis.

The Vicar should prepare their own personal fire plan outlining where they would stay and the contact details, what items to take etc. A template for a personal plan is available at : <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/before-and-during-a-fire/your-bushfire-plan>

A copy of this plan should be given to the Wardens.

The Vicar should prepare and have ready for evacuation an evacuation kit including:

- personal documents
- personal clothing and items
- personal items with sentimental value such as paintings, photos etc.

2. Monitoring

During the fire season (Nov to March) the Vicar and Wardens should monitor the Fire Danger Ratings. In the event of a Catastrophic or Extreme Fire Rating, the Vicar and Wardens should meet on zoom to discuss the specific situation and the plans that need to happen.

The policy for Catastrophic and Extreme Fire Warnings will be followed.

3. Decision to Evacuate

On Catastrophic Fire Days the Vicar and family should evacuate the night before.

In the case of fire the guidelines on the Vic Emergency App for the Cockatoo area must be followed. This applies to the Vicar and family and anyone at the Church or Hall.

If a programme is actually running when a fire threatens Cockatoo, the programme must stop, all participants must be sent home and encouraged to leave the fire zone. If this is not possible, programme coordinators must the seek information from emergency services and follow their advice.

An early decision to evacuate should be taken. The priority must be the personal safety of the staff and participants.

4. Communication

The Vicar and Wardens should stay in contact throughout the Emergency period if possible. However, phone and internet may be disrupted in an emergency.

Where possible regular updates (at least daily) should be sent out to parishioners and also posted on the website.

5. If a Fire Destroys the Property

If a fire destroys or damages the property, the Vicar and Wardens will review the situation. Any directions by emergency services must be followed.

Alternative meeting arrangements and accommodation will be discussed and arranged through the Wardens.

6. Once Safe to Return

Once a Catastrophic Fire Warning has been removed, or the fire is listed as under control and residents are told it is safe to return, the Vicar and family can return home.

Normal church services and programmes can resume at this point.

7. Debrief

After any fire event, the Vicar and Wardens should meet to debrief and review this Fire Plan and update it from the learnings that had taken place.